

# FIELD OF THE YEAR



**Wright National Soccer Campus**, of the National Soccer Hall of Fame, Earns STMA Soccer Field of the Year Honors in the Municipal Division.

by Steve and Suz Trusty

**T**he Wright National Soccer Campus of the National Soccer Hall of Fame earned STMA 2000 Soccer Field of the Year honors in the Municipal Division. The Soccer Hall of Fame is located on a 57-acre site in Oneonta, NY. The current four-field Wright Soccer Complex and the 36,000-sq-ft Hall of Fame facility are the result of a vision that started 21 years ago. Envisioned for future development are two more playing fields and a lighted stadium with a seating capacity of approximately 6,000. Plans also include on-site dormitories and two indoor playing areas.

Turf Manager for the Soccer Hall of Fame, since the completion of its construction, is Kevin I. Meredith. His company, Meredith Maintenance, is contracted to provide field maintenance along with other landscape services associated with the facility. Besides Kevin, who works the typical sports turf manager schedule year-round, Meredith Maintenance employs two full-time seasonal employees from April through November. These personnel assist with painting lines and other specific tasks at the soccer complex, but spend the majority of their time at other company projects. Meredith handles mowing, fertilizer and pesticide applications, striping of the lines, and the management functions of the total field and landscape maintenance programs for the Soccer Hall of Fame. That this is a labor of love shows in the way Meredith talks about these fields, and in the excellent results he has achieved with them.

Following are a few excerpts from a letter Gene Chilion, Summer Tournament Director for the Complex, sent



Kevin Meredith (left), Turf Manager for the National Soccer Hall of Fame, discusses the great condition and incredible drainage of the fields with John Ellinger, the U-17 Men's National Team Coach.



Field Number 1, 2 and 3 (pictured) are often in use at the same time.

to Meredith on August 30, 2000. "Congratulations on another superlative job as Turf Manager at the National Soccer Hall of Fame. We had 209 teams, over 8,000 players, and in excess of 400 matches on the Soccer Hall of Fame fields in Oneonta over a 10-week period." And, "I sent an evaluation form to coaches after each tournament. The rating scale went from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent). Every coach rated the fields a 4! I believe this is a direct result of your dedication, knowledge and work ethic."

The four regulation fields at the Wright National Campus were built in the fall of 1990. Meredith says, "The New York National Guard did the initial site work, including clearing of the land. The Clark Companies built the fields in about twelve weeks. The soil profile is a ten-inch depth of 85 percent sand and 15 percent on-site organic material. Drainage is facilitated by conventional sub-surface drain tile placed on 18-foot centers. The Kentucky bluegrass-perennial ryegrass sod for the fields was obtained from both Batavia Sod Farms and Saratoga Sod Farm."

The fields are not lighted. There are a total of 1,600 seats spaced around the fields. These seats can be moved to accommodate spectators. When all of the seats are consolidated, they form a "mini-stadium" for major events.

"Irrigation was labor-intensive and arduous the first two years," notes Meredith. "We used 1-1/2-inch black plastic pipe to channel water from fire hydrants to sprinklers. This system had to be moved from field to field every two hours. The Rainbird irrigation system was installed in 1993. It consists of 24 zones, with four R70 rotors per zone, coupled to an ESP-MC controller. As the R70 rotors get older and malfunction more often, we're gradually replacing them with Rainbird Falcons."

"Water now is supplied by a well, 360 feet deep," Meredith says. "While it had been anticipated this would produce water at 100 gallons per minute (gpm), actual output is 38 gpm. This necessitated a reduction of the orifice from 18 to 9 gpm

## National Soccer Hall of Fame Field Maintenance Program

### FERTILIZATION

**Soil test:** biannually in spring; pH average 6.5 to 6.6

**April:** Roots 1-2-3

**May 15:** Application of 22-4-10

**Late June:** Application of 22-4-10

**Mid-July:** Application of 22-3-8

**Early September:** Application of 18-3-18

**End of October:** Application of 20-4-10 (all slow-release N for early spring green)

### CORE AERATION

**Cores:** always drag matted back into soil profile

**Early spring:** Full field, as soon as fields are firm enough not to be damaged

**Late June to mid-July:** Full field, with timing depending on use schedule and field condition

**Throughout playing season:** goal mouth area, every two weeks.

**August through mid-October:** Monthly, center field section, goal mouth width, length of field.

**Late October:** Full field

### MOWING, IRRIGATION, FIELD CARE

**Spring:** Mowing begins as turf growth dictates in early spring, generally by first week in May, frequency as needed.

**By June through end of playing season:** mowing at least three times weekly, every other day if needed.

**Water:** Well water pH averages 7.2.

**Early spring:** Inspect and start up irrigation system as weather conditions dictate. System operated according to weather conditions and evapotranspiration rates.

**Late October:** Winterize system, service generator.

**Topdressing:** Use on-site sand and topsoil mix to duplicate soil profile. Light applications following aeration combined with overseeding. In goal mouth area, weekly from June throughout playing season.

**Overseeding:** In goal mouth area, weekly from June throughout playing season. Following applications of topdressing; seed raked in.

**Painting:** Game day painting, and for practices, depending on schedule.

### PEST CONTROL

**May 15:** Dimension for pre-emergent control of crabgrass and broadleaf weed seed.

**Late June:** Trimec if needed for broadleaf weed control.

**Mid-July:** Merit for insect control. IPM practices are followed, with controls applied only as needed.



Meredith refers to Field Number 4 (pictured) as his best turf. The rich, dark green color is further highlighted by the white National Soccer Hall of Fame building in the background.

on the heads. The resultant reduction in the volume of water requires watering for longer periods of time. To complicate the irrigation process, there is no power available at the well. Power to run the pump is supplied by a generator which requires near constant attention and maintenance. To deliver an adequate

amount of water during dry periods the pump must run 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. While the new system is far better than dragging piping, it is still labor intensive."

The rapid drainage capacity of the sand-based fields does require greater than average delivery of water, but is a

real plus in terms of playability. Meredith says, "No matter how hard it rains or for whatever period it rains, there is no standing water on the fields. No game has ever been cancelled because of wet field conditions. Lightning yes, water no. Another benefit of this sand-based profile and drainage system is the development of dense and deep rooting. Our turfgrass root depth runs between 6 and 9 inches. I believe this makes for some very strong and divot-resistant turf."

Field use runs from May through November. During the summer tournaments, the majority of play takes place on the weekends. The average weekend will have between 8 and 10 games per field. Meredith says, "The summer of 2000 brought rainfall every weekend and the fields were able to stand up to it. There were very few divots and we had surprisingly little damage to the goal areas."

The fall season produces the most continuous usage. There are few days from mid-August through November when there is not some soccer-related activity at the complex.

Meredith says, "We have the Oneonta State College men's and women's teams practicing and playing their games on the fields. We have the Oneonta High School boys' and girls' varsity and junior varsity teams playing. We also have the Milford Central School boys' and girls' soccer teams practicing and playing their games here.

"Besides these regular field users," Meredith continues, "we have several other teams that play their games at the fields because our facility is located approximately halfway between the two schools. In addition, in 2000, the fields were used by Tufts University and New York University for a week of intense pre-season practice. We also were privileged to have both the U.S. and Canadian U-17 National Teams at the fields for practice, and free clinics for the local youth soccer programs."

Because Oneonta is in upstate New York, late season soccer means dealing with snow. Meredith says, "There are two things I do to help alleviate the problems caused by the

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white stuff. First, starting around mid-October, I paint my lines blue. This allows them to be visible if it snows. It also helps the lines show up better with the lower angle of the sun. Secondly, to remove heavy snow from the fields, we use a rubber-bladed plow to push the snow off the fields. Then we use a small backhoe to move the snow from the field sign and goal areas. We've not yet figured out what to do about the frozen ground."

Meredith develops and carries out the turf maintenance program. As an independent contractor, he reports directly to, and works closely with, Will Lunn, President of the National Soccer Hall of Fame. He also communicates regularly with the tournament director and event coordinator. He also has an open invitation to attend weekly staff meetings to brief others on issues relating to field conditions and to receive operating information regarding the rest of the facility. This interaction and open communication are extremely beneficial in allowing the entire program to function efficiently.

Meredith notes the Hall of Fame complex is a work in progress. He says, "We're constantly improving and upgrading the facility. Some of these improvements are maintenance 'tricks of the trade.' Once a month, we core aerate down the center section of the fields, covering a span as wide as the goal area. We drag mat the plugs back into the soil profile and overseed with 80 percent perennial ryegrass and 20 percent bluegrass, using a varying mix of cultivars to avoid creating a monostand. We'll use the core aerator in the goal mouth every couple weeks and drag the cores in, and topdress and overseed the goal mouth area weekly. This gradually creates a slight elevation or 'mounding' that eliminates puddling.

"Additions to the complex this spring," Meredith continues, "included the installation of poles and 40 decorative banners. The banners are all different colors with images of soccer balls placed at differing locations on each banner. This creates the illusion of the soccer balls bouncing along the banner route. We've also installed

black vinyl-coated chain link fencing, with the gates in appropriate spots for quick retrieval of the soccer balls."

The National Soccer Hall of Fame complex is the result of cooperative planning and communication, effective management, hard work, perseverance, and striving for the common goal

of producing an excellent soccer facility that allows athletes to play with confidence. It's the precise formula to earn Field of the Year honors.

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